

When the Land Was Young

Friend Christopher Chetwind, Thy presence is desired on 19th September, instant, being the happy anniversary of our wedding day, the golden wedding of us twain. Thy wife (our daughter) and so many of thy family as may conveniently come are bidden with thee to the feast.

THEODORA SAKBY.
HUGH SAKBY.

Dated Sept. 15, 1867.

This quaint invitation is among the sacred relics of our family, preserved in the oaken writing desk which belonged to my grandmother, to whose golden wedding my father was thereby invited. Alas! to think that my own silver wedding is since passed and the golden wedding day approaching. The name of Sakby even has already disappeared, except only in my eldest son, Hugh Saxby Moreland, who himself has left the home of his youth and is now a prosperous merchant of St. Louis.

But it was to write of my grandmother that I took up my pen, and to that intent I have opened her cabinet and taken out therefrom the packet of her letters and her journal to refresh my memory and bring before me the remembrance of herself and the story of her life, which she told to me after I went to live at her house an orphan, my father and mother having both died of a fever which ravaged the land. And the better to have my grandmother before the reader's eyes I will let her speak as she spoke to me when, telling the story:

I was born (said my grandmother) in the midst of strife, when our land was being freed from the tyrant, as the saying was, though in truth men fought for liberty of conscience at the first rather than for separation from the mother country; but being borne along by success the ambition of a few snatched at the chance of political power and the land was declared independent. Nay, child (my grandmother still called me a child, though at the time I had already seen and loved John Moreland, my husband), nay, my child, do not ask me for a story of those times, though many were the deeds of heroism done by our countrymen, for I could only repeat to thee what I have heard my father and mother tell. Rather will I confine myself to what has happened to me, for it is well that thou shouldst know of it, seeing that it is of the history of our family.

My father's family before the late troubles with the King of England was of very considerable wealth and station, being descended from a former governor of the colonies dispatched hither by King Charles II, whose son elected to remain here after the term of his father had expired. We were therefore more highly thought of, being higher born than the other settlers in these parts, who were the most part Quakers, Anabaptists and others who sought here the liberty of conscience denied them in England, though some of them equalled our family in wealth of possessions.

I was brought up straightly as regards etiquette, though in matters of religion rather loosely. I have since come, by the grace of God, to treat more seriously of heavenly things and less of earthly through the influence of my dear husband, and from him I have also learned to say thee and thou, though not a Quaker, as he is. I grew up to be a beautiful girl. Nay, doubt not, child. Though I am bent and wrinkled, remember that I am now near eighty years of age, and surely I do not look so old as to speak of that which has long since withered away, except in the eyes of one only, who tells me that I am more beautiful to-day than I ever was while he is to me the comeliest man I have ever seen. But I am wandering. Thou shouldst keep me to my story, child.

My father, then, was associated with a large retinue of servants, and slaves to till the fields, and the house was continually filled with guests to kill the monotony of his country life. Of religion there was very little in the house save in the outward form of attending church. In politics my father's cavalier blood remained unchanged. I have even heard him complain, when talking to his friends, that the country was no longer fit to live in, since Jack was as good as his master and the privileges of the gentry were all swept away. Yet he submitted to the change brought about by General Washington, and served a number of years as a member of Congress.

I know what thou wouldst have me tell, saucy girl. The story of my meeting with thy grandfather and his courtship; a love story, child. They are the blazon of thy innocence, and thy John is a good man and true.

Our first meeting of which I have remembrance was on this wise. The Saxby farm marched with my father's estate, and we were neighbors, though the distance between the two was but a few miles. I was a girl of about sixteen, and my elder sister being of marriageable age, though not yet married, I was kept under somewhat until she should be spoken for. My father, however, I was glad to take my opportunity to run away from the observations of our governess, and so, mounting my pony one day—since he was so useful a creature, and so memorable to me, being the 19th of September—I rode away alone, pretending to go no further than the paddock, where I was allowed to ride without restraint. I had ridden a while in the paddock, being tempted by the beauty of the day, the mad it seized me to canter through the woods, which came here almost to the house.

Accordingly, I opened the paddock gate, and, gaining the road unseen, was soon galloping down the thoroughfare which led over hill and dale to the next village. All went well until, reaching the bottom of the hill, I came to a stream which crossed the road, and I was obliged to dismount and wade across. Here I designed to stop and retrace my steps, but the pony, scenting the water, would no longer obey me. Without regarding my peril, I walked into the water, which reached so high as to wet my habit, and there he began drinking to his heart's content, making as if he would lie down and wallow in the water. Never was maid, I think, in such perplexity, yet if I had but kept my wits about me, I should have remembered that the pony would soon be done drinking and would then willingly turn homeward. Instead of remaining still, as I should have done, I sat straining at the reins and crying aloud for help, though my voice seemed lost in that wilderness. At my first cry I heard a gun discharged, as if in alarm, and a great distance from me, and soon a beautiful spaniel came running to the margin of the stream, wagging its tail as if in token of approaching aid. A few moments afterwards a tall young man, about twenty years of age, bearing a fowling piece in his hand, strode through the underbrush and came also to the bank.

"Didst thou call for help?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered, pettishly; "my pony will not come out of the water," pulling at the reins while I spoke, "pulling at the reins while I spoke, stepping into the stream, he laid hold of my pony's bridle and led him unresisting out of the water."

I was too confused to observe the person who had thus opportunely come to my assistance, but to notice that he was tall and straight, clad in a gray suit, which became him well, with a frank open countenance, as he gravely led

my pony to the bank, though a twinkle in his eyes as of suppressed merriment, made me pout and blush; my hair also, having come unbound in my ride, hung over my shoulders and made me look the more discomfited. His fowling piece and well-filled game bag explained his presence in the woods. Arrived on dry land, he let go of my bridle, and, uncovering his head, he said:

"I am, Hugh Saxby, at thy service," making a reverence, though I still saw the laughter in his eye. "May I see thee safe on thy way?"

"Thank you," I answered as haughtily as I could, being ashamed to be beholden to a Quaker of whom I had often heard my father speak contemptuously, and being hurt in my pride to be found by him in such a plight, and the more so as I could see he was inwardly merry at my expense. "I am not far from home," my father, Mr. Ardell, will require you for this present necessity. The rules of our community will not allow me to take a pledge of thee beyond thy word. This is my offer; it is for thee to accept or to refuse."

"You and your money go to perdition," roared my father, beside himself with rage, springing from his chair. "You tell me, with your smug face and cunning name, I thought, but I could only hear the syllables 'Dora,' which made my heart glad, and I mingled my tears with the water I was using. My father now approached me, and he being so near, I told him, 'how did all this happen? How comes it that you and the son of my enemy are together in this plight?'"

"He defended me from a bear," I replied; "but first let him be removed to a bed and properly tended, and then I will tell thee the whole story."

"Not if he were dying a thousand deaths in one, and I could with a word ease his pain, would I say that word!" cried my father. "To the dunghill with him! He has already had too much attention here!"

Seeing that my father was so set against him, I ordered the yokel to drive him home, and, as he was a Quaker, so far as to permit it, and he being so exhausted nature again sought refuge in a swoon.

For two days I lay in bed, unnerved by my terrible experience and sorely tried by the unwonted great exertion of my strength. To my mother, on account of her ill health, I told as little as possible of the struggle with the bear, making light of it and treating it as if a slight accident had happened to me. To my father I told the whole story, only not leaving him to think that we had met by chance, nor of the words which had passed between us while we faced together the danger coming upon us.

With a straightforward man, as my lover was, I knew that so soon as he was able to leave his bed he would seek my father to tell him of his love for me. Nor was I mistaken, for on the fourth day after our adventure he called upon my father and boldly asked for my hand in marriage. My father took the proposition, as I feared he would, as the greatest insult which could be offered to his name and person. I did not see Hugh when he was called, but my father forbade me, under penalty of his curse, to speak to the man again. I was sorrowful to hear this, but not cast down, because I trusted my lover and felt in my heart that he trusted me.

So two or three weeks passed without our meeting, during which time a constant watch was kept upon my movements, for fear that I should meet my lover. I was not allowed to leave the vicinity of the house unaccompanied, but a maid would always follow me. I had noticed for several evenings that some one was watching me, and I was sure which ran along the stream at the foot of the hill where our house stood, but without taking thought what it meant, until the idea struck me in the night, my lover signaling to me to meet him in my head but I set to work to find a way of meeting him if it should be he, of which I had no doubt.

Chance favored me, and stepping out without my hat, to appear as if it were not my intention to go far afield, I followed the direction of the stream, being come to the edge of the wood I whistled softly and immediately the spaniel appeared, followed in a moment by her master, who was waiting for the rapture of that meeting. Ah, me! we were young then, and it seems so long ago. Hugh took me in his arms at once and kissed me, and he seemed so his dear, his heroic, his prince, and many other extravagances. By and by he took me to his shoulder, I rallied him.

"Thou art slow, Hugh," said I, "to let a girl get the first kiss of thee."

"What dost thou mean?" he asked, while I laughed to see the wonder in his eyes.

"Why, simply this," said I, "that I have kissed thee long ere thou has kissed me."

"And so he felt to kissing me again, though he had scarce done anything else since our meeting, and made me tell the story of our meeting, after the time that he lost consciousness in the bear's embrace. After this we fell to walking, arm in arm, to and fro, a small he being in the woods, discoursing of the future."

"My father," said I, "has forbidden me to have communication with thee, Hugh."

"Aye, and he forbade me also," replied Hugh, "but I laughed at him and told him to bind me who would mind over me, having no authority over me. I denied his right to appoint my doings."

"Thou wert rash," said I, though proud of his manliness, "but if thou wilt not be so, I will not be so either. Not so, sweetheart," he said; "thou art of age and may do whatsoever thou wishest."

"Nay," I replied, "but a father's word must be made more of than that. Whilst I abide under his roof I must obey his will."

"Then leave his roof," urged Hugh. "Let us be married now. Every day we wait is an age! Why should we throw away our happiness?"

"To urge me, for the gratification of our love, to disobey my father?" I replied. "I will not do that. I did not mean to reproach him, and so interrupted him."

"Nay, there is no reproach, Hugh," I said, "but only let us argue the matter out. I will not do so, but I will not misunderstand. So shall we agree upon the matter as if we were already man and wife."

He looked at me a moment, and then he kissed me a thousand times, and so it has ever been with us since then in our disputes, each knowing that whatever father may say is but to bring the matter under consideration to proper understanding and never for to give offense or reproach.

And so, after some more talk, we parted, having no time to understand that we should wait and see if my father's heart should soften toward Hugh, but the severest test of his love was for him to promise to forbear place my muzzle, Hugh beat him about the head with the stock till the gun was shattered in his hands.

The stock, rose again, and with a roar rushed at me, who stood before him. My lover, with his hunting knife in hand, thrust it into the monster's side till the heart was reached. The blood gushed out over me, and the brute rolled over dead, my lover still in his embrace.

Now do I thank God, and have ever done so, that at this juncture a great calmness came over me, and I did that which I had not believed it in my nature to do. I saw the bear rush at me, and again in the monster's side till the heart was reached. The blood gushed out over me, and the brute rolled over dead, my lover still in his embrace.

Still the strange calmness possessed me. Instead of bewailing my lover's death, I released him from the carcass of the bear, and he lay dead, but he felt a slight flutter there, which brought me infinite relief. I kissed him

once, then, lifting him as well as I was able, I half dragged, half carried him towards our house. It was a weary, weary half mile I carried him, till I was observed by a farm servant, who was driving a wagon, laying down my burden. I halted the man, and with his help lifted Hugh into the wagon. Then, climbing in myself, I told the wondering driver to drive us home and instantly fell to the bottom of the wagon in a swoon.

There was great consternation upon our arrival at the house, where already my absence was noted. When the wagon drove to the door containing our motionless bodies, covered with blood and dirt, the servants thought us dead, and the commotion brought out my father. His solicitude for me was great until he saw the servants thought us dead, and the burning feathers under my nose, revived me, and I sat up, asking that Mr. Saxby lay to a bed and a surgeon for. At this my father was wroth and cried out against it.

"Shall I have this carrion in my house?" said he, "no, by my faith! The carrion shall be taken to the dunghill!"

Not heeding my father's words, I took water and washed my lover's face, pouring a little between his lips, till at last he moved and I heard him murmur my name, I thought, but I could only hear the syllables "Dora," which made my heart glad, and I mingled my tears with the water I was using. My father now approached me, and he being so near, I told him, "how did all this happen? How comes it that you and the son of my enemy are together in this plight?"

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With a straightforward man, as my lover was, I knew that so soon as he was able to leave his bed he would seek my father to tell him of his love for me. Nor was I mistaken, for on the fourth day after our adventure he called upon my father and boldly asked for my hand in marriage. My father took the proposition, as I feared he would, as the greatest insult which could be offered to his name and person. I did not see Hugh when he was called, but my father forbade me, under penalty of his curse, to speak to the man again. I was sorrowful to hear this, but not cast down, because I trusted my lover and felt in my heart that he trusted me.

So two or three weeks passed without our meeting, during which time a constant watch was kept upon my movements, for fear that I should meet my lover. I was not allowed to leave the vicinity of the house unaccompanied, but a maid would always follow me. I had noticed for several evenings that some one was watching me, and I was sure which ran along the stream at the foot of the hill where our house stood, but without taking thought what it meant, until the idea struck me in the night, my lover signaling to me to meet him in my head but I set to work to find a way of meeting him if it should be he, of which I had no doubt.

Chance favored me, and stepping out without my hat, to appear as if it were not my intention to go far afield, I followed the direction of the stream, being come to the edge of the wood I whistled softly and immediately the spaniel appeared, followed in a moment by her master, who was waiting for the rapture of that meeting. Ah, me! we were young then, and it seems so long ago. Hugh took me in his arms at once and kissed me, and he seemed so his dear, his heroic, his prince, and many other extravagances. By and by he took me to his shoulder, I rallied him.

"Thou art slow, Hugh," said I, "to let a girl get the first kiss of thee."

"What dost thou mean?" he asked, while I laughed to see the wonder in his eyes.

"Why, simply this," said I, "that I have kissed thee long ere thou has kissed me."

"And so he felt to kissing me again, though he had scarce done anything else since our meeting, and made me tell the story of our meeting, after the time that he lost consciousness in the bear's embrace. After this we fell to walking, arm in arm, to and fro, a small he being in the woods, discoursing of the future."

"My father," said I, "has forbidden me to have communication with thee, Hugh."

"Aye, and he forbade me also," replied Hugh, "but I laughed at him and told him to bind me who would mind over me, having no authority over me. I denied his right to appoint my doings."

"Thou wert rash," said I, though proud of his manliness, "but if thou wilt not be so, I will not be so either. Not so, sweetheart," he said; "thou art of age and may do whatsoever thou wishest."

"Nay," I replied, "but a father's word must be made more of than that. Whilst I abide under his roof I must obey his will."

"Then leave his roof," urged Hugh. "Let us be married now. Every day we wait is an age! Why should we throw away our happiness?"

"To urge me, for the gratification of our love, to disobey my father?" I replied. "I will not do that. I did not mean to reproach him, and so interrupted him."

"Nay, there is no reproach, Hugh," I said, "but only let us argue the matter out. I will not do so, but I will not misunderstand. So shall we agree upon the matter as if we were already man and wife."

He looked at me a moment, and then he kissed me a thousand times, and so it has ever been with us since then in our disputes, each knowing that whatever father may say is but to bring the matter under consideration to proper understanding and never for to give offense or reproach.

And so, after some more talk, we parted, having no time to understand that we should wait and see if my father's heart should soften toward Hugh, but the severest test of his love was for him to promise to forbear place my muzzle, Hugh beat him about the head with the stock till the gun was shattered in his hands.

The stock, rose again, and with a roar rushed at me, who stood before him. My lover, with his hunting knife in hand, thrust it into the monster's side till the heart was reached. The blood gushed out over me, and the brute rolled over dead, my lover still in his embrace.

Now do I thank God, and have ever done so, that at this juncture a great calmness came over me, and I did that which I had not believed it in my nature to do. I saw the bear rush at me, and again in the monster's side till the heart was reached. The blood gushed out over me, and the brute rolled over dead, my lover still in his embrace.

Still the strange calmness possessed me. Instead of bewailing my lover's death, I released him from the carcass of the bear, and he lay dead, but he felt a slight flutter there, which brought me infinite relief. I kissed him

once, then, lifting him as well as I was able, I half dragged, half carried him towards our house. It was a weary, weary half mile I carried him, till I was observed by a farm servant, who was driving a wagon, laying down my burden. I halted the man, and with his help lifted Hugh into the wagon.